

Message Text

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43

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SUBJECT: POSSIBLE AUTUMN ELECTIONS?

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. DUBLIN'S POLITICAL COLUMNISTS HAVE BEEN RAISING AGAIN THE POSSIBILITY OF PRIME MINISTER COSGRAVE CALLING A SNAP GENERAL ELECTION THIS FALL, ONE YEAR BEFORE MANDATORY ELECTIONS MUST BE HELD. BECAUSE OF THE TRADITIONAL AUGUST VACATION PERIOD, IT HAS BEEN IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE EMBASSY TO ADEQUATELY ASSESS THIS POSSIBILITY. A FAIRLY GOOD CASE CAN BE MADE FOR CALLING AN ELECTION NOW. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT MIGHT JUST BE THAT THE POLITICAL WRITERS HAVE NOTHING BETTER TO THINK ABOUT DURING THE SUMMER DOLDRUMS. END SUMMARY.

2. SEVERAL RESPECTED POLITICAL WRITERS IN DUBLIN HAVE BEEN SUGGESTING THAT PRIME MINISTER COSGRAVE WILL BE TEMPTED TO CALL A GENERAL ELECTION THIS AUTUMN. THE THEORY IS THAT THE RULING COALITION IS TEMPTED TO FACE AT THE POLLS THE UNCERTAINTIES OF 1976 RATHER THAN THE VERY UNCERTAIN UNCERTAINTIES OF 1977. THE POPULARITY OF THE COALITION GOVERNMENT REMAINS SURPRISINGLY HIGH DESPITE THE TROUBLED ECONOMY AND THE COALITION FINDS ITSELF TWO SEATS UP AND THE FIANNA FAIL THREE SEATS DOWN, AS COMPARED TO 1973 ELECTION LEVELS.

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3. A LOT WILL PROBABLY DEPEND UPON THE CABINET'S ASSESSMENT OF THE 1977 BUDGET AS WELL AS THE CABINET'S VIEW OF THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY FOR THE YEAR AHEAD. A HAIR SHIRT BUDGET NEXT YEAR IS NOT EXACTLY THE STUFF OF WHICH SUCCESSFUL ELECTIONS ARE MADE AND ALMOST CERTAIN 1977 CUTS IN PUBLIC EXPENDITURES WILL NOT GO DOWN WELL WITH LABOR, THE JUNIOR PARTNER IN THE COALITION.

4. OPINION IS DEVIDED OVER WHETHER THERE WILL BE A DEMONSTRABLE IMPROVEMENT IN THE ECONOMY. FINANCE MINISTER RICHIE RYAN IS A SUPER OPTIMIST, FORECASTING A TWO PERCENT GROWTH DURING THE CURRENT YEAR. HE STANDS ALMOST ALONE, WITH MOST PRIVATE ECONOMISTS FORECASTING A STAGNATION OR EVEN A DOWNTURN. A "GREEN PAPER," A SOON-TO-BE-ISSUED GENERAL DISCUSSION DOCUMENT ON A FUTURE "NATIONAL PLAN," OFFERS THE GOVERNMENT THIS FALL THE CHANCE OF PRESENTING IN OUTLINE FORM THE NATURE OF THE CHALLENGES OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS. THE APPEARANCE OF THIS PAPER WOULD ALLOW THE GOVERNMENT A VALID PRETEXT FOR SEEKING EARLY-ON A NEW MANDATE TO TACKLE THE IMMENSE PROBLEMS FACING THE COUNTRY OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS.

5. ANOTHER EVENT THAT POINTS TOWARD THE DESIRABILITY OF ELECTIONS THIS FALL IS THE NEED TO APPOINT AN EEC COMMISSIONER TO REPLACE PATRICK HILLARY OF FIANNA FAIL. IF THE GOVERNMENT'S CHOICE WERE TO BE A STRONG MEMBER OF THE CABINET LIKE FOREIGN MINISTER FITZGERALD OR COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER KEATING, THE COALITION WOULD BE DEPRIVED OF A MAJOR CAMPAIGN ASSET NEXT YEAR. WERE THE GENERAL ELECTION TO BE HELD THIS FALL, THE CABINET COULD RUN INTACT AND THE EEC APPOINTMENT AND RESULTANT CABINET RESHUFFLE COULD QUIETLY TAKE PLACE BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR. ALSO COSGRAVE MUST ESTIMATE THE EFFECT OF THE RETURN OF THE VERY POPULAR HILLARY TO IRISH POLITICS, A BIG PLUS FOR THE OPPOSITION.

6. COMMENT: WITH THE DAIL OUT OF SESSION, THE GOVERNMENT VIRTUALLY CLOSED DOWN, AND ALL POLITICANS ON VACATION, THERE IS VERY LITTLE THE EMBASSY CAN DO TO GET A SOLID READING FROM OUR POLITICAL CONTACTS. IT MAY JUST SIMPLY BE A CASE OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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POLITICAL WRITERS HAVING NOTHING BETTER TO DO DURING THE SUMMER DOLDRUMS THAN TO DREAM UP STORIES. WE'LL BE WATCHING THE SUBJECT WHEN THE PARLIAMENT COMES BACK FOR A SPECIAL SESSION AT THE END OF THIS MONTH. ALONG WITH THE ABOVE RATHER QUANTITATIVE SPECULATION ON COSGRAVE'S ALTERNATIVES, WE SHOULD STRESS THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE JUNIOR COALITION PARTY, LABOR, WHICH PRESUMABLY MUST BE CONSULTED BEFORE GOING TO THE COUNTRY. ECONOMIC NECESSITY WOULD SEEM TO

PREDICATE SOME KIND OF AN INCOMES POLICY NEXT YEAR AND IN
SUCCEEDING YEARS. THIS, OF COURSE, HITS LABOR'S CONSTITUENCY
HARD, AND LABOR CAN ESTIMATE THAT ITS SUPPORT MIGHT WELL
BE LESS IN '77 THAN THIS FALL, WHEN SUCH A POLICY IS ONLY
A VAGUE PROPOSAL IN A DRAFT GREEN PAPER. LABOR HAS THE
ALTERNATIVE OF PULLING OUT OF THE COALITION, AND THUS
PROBABLY CHECKING THE STEADY DIMINUTION OF ITS SUPPORT, BUT WE
DOUBT THAT THE LABOR LEADERS ARE EAGER TO GIVE UP THE HEADY
PERKS OF POWER. ALL IN ALL, THE POLITICAL SITUATION IS MURKY.
CURLEY

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